

Global Pact for the Environment World Animal Net

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Thank you Chair.
All Protocols observed.

We welcome the initiative on Global Pact for the Environment
And the consideration of GAPs in existing environmental law.
But to do this exercise in most effective way we must not restrict ourselves to
existing conventions and paradigms.

We need to take a helicopter view of what is needed – start with problems and
look for systemic root causes.
Then prioritise proactive and preventative approaches.

We need to reimagine and reinvent structures and systems which are not
working. Not just to apply more sticking plaster solutions – “mitigation” tactics.

Take for example our food systems: with industrial animal agriculture being the
single human activity with the largest environmental impact. Yet its many
detrimental impacts are hardly covered by existing environmental law. We know
many of the solutions to this already – agro-ecological solutions, eating lower
down the food chain – more plant-based options, economic incentives for
change and disincentives for unsustainable and polluting production, work on
food waste etc. etc.

Why I ask myself do we not yet have the structures, systems and agreements
needed to address these issues?

UN Environment’s Acting Executive Director stressed in her opening speech that
almost 70% of wildlife has been wiped out since 1970.

Yet, ever since 1970 – beginning with the Stockholm Conference in 1972 – we
have had outcome documents stressing the urgency of the environmental crisis.
Commitments to act. A body of resolutions....

And yet the decline continues. Almost 50 years later!

Why?

I am convinced that at least some Environmental Ministers will have returned to their capitals fired up. Then they met their Ministerial colleagues across the table - finance, industry etc. Who listened, and then balanced against national economic interests, impact on GDP etc. Followed by a nosedive of political will.

Yet there is no sustainable development – no economic progress, no social progress - without a healthy and functioning environment.

That is why we need a strengthened international environmental system. Which the Pact could provide, if it is approached with a sense urgency and commitment to ensure the changes needed to prevent planetary disaster – rather than just as a technical legal exercise. It will not deliver if it is not backed by political will. It will not deliver if it is not action- and solution-orientated.

The Commons Cluster of the NGO Major Group has suggested strong provisions in areas such as:

- Recognition of planetary boundaries – action to be taken to ensure that we return to and remain within planetary boundaries
- Recognition of the inherent rights of nature
- A duty to care for the environment
- Government actions to reduce human impacts on the environment
- Economic measures on disincentives and incentives for beneficial change
- Development of respect and reverence for nature.

My organisation, World Animal Net, has provided a brief on the Pact and the GAP report, which is available on the meeting website. I will not repeat this, but just introduce it briefly.

We were extremely disappointed to note that the GAP report includes nothing whatsoever on the sentience of animals, and the need to protect their welfare. Indeed, the only time animals are even afforded a mention is in the title of the “Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals” – plus once in “plant and animal germ plasm”.

There is now an extensive body of science in support of animal sentience, and both the African Union and the European Union require animals to be treated as sentient beings.

There are also a large number of internationally-accepted science-based animal welfare standards, regional strategies for animal welfare covering every continent, and a Global Animal Welfare Strategy, which is prefaced with the statement that: “in recognition of the sentience of animals, the use of animals requires that any such use is humane”.

We are calling for recognition of animals as sentient beings within the Global Pact – and the UN’s work more broadly. UN work began with an anthropocentric mindset, was extended to recognise the importance of environmental protection, but has never recognised the importance of animals and their welfare (never mind their rights) – relegating them to “resources” or part of “biodiversity”.

This lack of recognition must be considered a gap which needs to be filled

There will never be policy coherence if these policy streams are left to develop in separate silos.